

homework 3

Semantics 3, UCLA Linguistics

due April 18, 2022

Consider the sentences in (1), crucially involving the degree adverb *a lot*. (1-a) should be ambiguous between an event and object interpretation, while (1-b) should be unambiguous. Check in with yourself in English/French, yourself in another language, or a colleague in English/French if you need to better understand this distinction.

- (1) a. Kendra went to the movies a lot.
b. It rained a lot.

- (2) a. Sylvie va beaucoup au cinéma.
'Sylvie goes to the movies a lot.'
b. Il a plu beaucoup.
'It rained a lot.'

- A. Provide an **empirical generalization** of when (=under what conditions) you get the ambiguity, and when you don't. Provide at least one more pair of sentence to exemplify your claim.
- B. Provide an informal **theoretical explanation** of why you think it might be that the contexts you specified in A are connected with the attested readings.
- C. Given what you say above, is this an ambiguity or a polysemy? If the former, what are your predictions about how these readings are distributed in other languages? If the latter, what is the primary reading?

These degree adverbs can modify (some) DPs, too.

- (3) a lot of a·books / b·soup / c·#teapot

- (4) a. beaucoup de livres
a-lot of books
b. beaucoup de soupe
a-lot of soup
c. #beaucoup de théière
a-lot of teapot

- D. The (c) phrases in (3) and (4) are given # marks because they are thought to have non-standard interpretations. Say a little bit about what you think is going wrong (or differently) in these (c) sentences.

Bonus exercise: Consider the modified VPs below.

- (5) a. #Kendra has written the letter a lot.
b. #Jeanne a beaucoup écrit la lettre.
J has a-lot written the letter

- E. They've been given the same # judgment as the (c) sentences in (3) and (4). Talk informally about why you think that might be, i.e. how you would characterize the difference between the acceptable (a) and (b) sentences in (3) and (4).
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Credit where credit is due: **degree adverbs**

Burnett, Heather. 2012. The role of microvariation in the study of semantic universals: adverbial quantifiers in European and Québec French. *Journal of Semantics* 29(1): 1–38.

Doetjes, Jenny. 2006. Adverbs and quantification: degree versus frequency. *Lingua* 117:685–720.